



Tucson Oblate Newsletter

March 2013

As we look forward to Easter at the end of this month, I hope that these days of Lent are full of both challenge and promise for all of us. As we in Tucson study the ups and downs of monasticism throughout history, we can look for comparable cycles of renewal in our own lives. At our February Oblate meeting, we listened to Prof. William Cook's lecture on "Monasticism—Benedict and His Rule" from *The Catholic Church: A History*, one of the Great Courses offerings. Dr. Cook traced the "monastic impulse" back to Christ, pointing out that he lived celibately, simply, and in service to others. So, although Jesus did not do this as part of a fixed community, a monastic life "makes sense." Early followers of Jesus, such as widows, also lived lives of celibacy, simplicity, and service, and Cook sees them as monastic forerunners.

By the second half of the Third Century, there were men and women living outside the cities and in the deserts, seeking a closer relationship with God. Especially famous was St. Anthony of Egypt, who heard the reading, "If you want to be perfect, go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me." (Mt 19:21). He took this literally, and over time people were drawn to him, some joining him as disciples. Anthony could be called the first monk.

By the mid-Fourth Century, both eremitic and cenobitic monastic communities were forming. Pachomius was the first to set up a community with a rule. By the end of the Fourth Century, St. Basil had asserted that cenobitic life was preferable, a stance also taken by St. Benedict when writing his Rule, which became the most important document in Western Monasticism.

Why was the Rule of Benedict so influential? Cook says that it was "intrinsically brilliant," providing both for structure/discipline and for human nature. All were to be treated equally, but this did not mean that everyone was treated the same as everyone else. Benedict envisioned strong leadership, a day in which prayer and work were flexibly merged. Benedict's strong stand against personal ownership meant that social class and status were left behind. All that mattered in the monastery was virtue, obedience, and "good zeal."

By the end of the Fourth Century, the Roman Empire was falling apart. Monasticism spread through Western Europe, and monasteries became centers of learning that preserved much of Western culture. As

Cook points out, we have some very valuable literature from early monasticism: sayings of the desert fathers and mothers, Evagrius, Cassian, and Gregory's life of St. Benedict.

TUCSON: Next meeting Sunday, March 17, at 2:00 p.m. - Doors open at 1:15

Candidates and inquirers meet upstairs in the PRAYER ROOM at 1:30 promptly. Mila Aroskar will lead the sharing. The assignment for the March meeting is to read the following chapters from *A Life-giving Way*:

- Chapter 32 Tools & Property of the Monastery
 - Chapter 49 On Lent
 - Chapter 58: On the Manner of Receiving Sisters
 - Chapter 59: On the Sons of Nobles and of the Poor
- Those who have not read the Read Ch. 19-20 on the Office and Reverence at Prayer, should do so.

At the 2:00 meeting, we will show the video, "Monks and Hermits—New Forms of Monasticism" from the Great Courses series on *The Catholic Church: A History*. In this section, Professor Cook talks about how monasteries faced challenges from inside and out, and how various reform movements rose up in response. In some ways, we can draw parallels between these reforms of the 10th-12th Centuries and the reforms of Vatican Council II, which told religious orders to be faithful both to the original "charism" of their founders and the "spirit of the times." In preparation for this meeting, please do some thinking about how Oblate life also asks us to adapt the Rule to the "spirit of the times."

PRESCOTT: Next meeting Sunday, March 17, 1:30-3:30 p.m.

Shirley Maday writes: At the February 17 meeting we began our study of the Preface: "Wish for a Better World" of Karen Armstrong's *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*. Members were given a Study Guide with questions and actions to consider with each chapter. It was agreed that there was value in the study of how the Golden Rule can be applied globally to insure that all peoples are treated as we would wish to be treated ourselves. The assignment for the next meeting is pages 25 through 65 of *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*.

For more information, call Nancy Hinshaw: 928-445-1271.

PHOENIX CENTRAL: Next meeting, Saturday, March 9, 2013, 8:45 a.m. for Inquirers and Candidates, and 9:30 a.m. for all. Mount Claret Retreat Center, 4633 North 54th Street, Phoenix, 85018.

Patty Williams writes: Please join us in our continued study of the Prologue of the Holy Rule. Lisa will be presenting the lesson in March. We are taking our time with Fr. Casey's study of the Prologue because he invites us to deeply reflect on the Prologue in light of our own experiences, and to seek "the road that leads to salvation." Everyone is welcome to come so please join us. Our meeting room is in the back of the Mount Claret Retreat Center in the Pope John Paul II room.

For more information call Patty Williams: 602-957-1464 or email Benedictine@cox.net

PHOENIX EAST VALLEY: Next meeting Saturday, March 23.

Nancy Kaib writes: The East Valley Benedictine Oblates met on Saturday, February 23. We shared presenting verses from Fr. Casey's book on the Prologue entitled *The Road to Eternal Life*. We will finish the book at our March meeting. We discussed what we will use to encourage our growth and understanding of St. Benedict's way for upcoming meetings. We also welcomed two new candidates: Debbie Zimmer, who became a candidate at the Monastery in January, and Theresa Angel, who has begun her formation and will participate in the candidacy ceremony at the Monastery in May.

For more information call Nancy Kaib, 480-883-8025 or Frank Young, 480-219-1505.

Library Corner

At the February meeting, a quick survey was distributed on issues relating to library usage and policies. Briefly, the overdue fine seemed to be a problem for only two respondents. When asked if a longer borrowing period would be preferred, most said no.

In regard to suggestions that the library be open at other times, we tried that one summer, and only one borrower came each time. The assembly room is frequently in use by groups, so we cannot reserve a definite day and have someone there during that time. However, we can arrange an appointment when an Oblate can come in and use the library.

As a result of the survey, we will be keeping the overdue fines and 1 month borrowing policies in place (except over summer and for Phoenix/Prescott Oblates).

Books may always be renewed via an email or phone call to Sr. Lenora or Mary. They can also arrange for a "library appointment" for anyone who needs one. On meeting days, the library opens at 1:15, and Oblates are welcome to stay after the meeting until 4:30 or so.

In response to the Library Survey, we went to Bookmans and were able to find the following:

- Thomas Merton's *Contemplation in a World of Action*. (This is a classic)
- Eileen Pagels' *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* and *The Gnostic Gospels*. If you're not familiar with Pagels, she has solid scholarly credentials and revisionist ideas about the Bible. Both books are written for a serious but non-scholarly audience.
- Scot McKnight's *Forty Days Living the Jesus Creed*. McKnight calls Jesus' commandment to love God and neighbor as self "The Jesus Creed." Building on his book of the same name, he writes about putting these principles into action.

Note that we like to get books from Bookmans (or Amazon if cheaper) whenever possible. Should you happen to have unwanted Bookmans credits, "Kitty" would be most grateful.

We also have acquired *Random Moments of Grace*, by Ginny Moyer. This book, the publisher suggests, "helps mothers realize that their spiritual lives don't have to stagnate in a world of playpens and playgrounds."

FEAST OF ST. BENEDICT on MARCH 21: Many Benedictines throughout the world celebrate this as the major feast of St. Benedict, commemorating the day of his death. Because this feast occurs in Lent, other Benedictines, including our monastery, observe March 21 as a lesser feast, and on July 11 celebrate the SOLEMNITY OF ST. BENEDICT.

According to tradition, St. Benedict had himself carried to the chapel when he was dying, and made his final offering standing, supported by two of his monks.



Artwork from *Our Father St. Benedict*, used with permission of the author and artist, New City Press 1982

May your Lent be fruitful and your Easter glorious!
Lenora, OSB